FIRE AND ICE

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Chapter II:

The Price of Power

THE STORY SO FAR

WAR IS COMING BETWEEN THE REALMS OF ICE AND FIRE, AND EVERYONE KNOWS IT. CAUGHT BETWEEN THE TWO KINGDOMS ARE UNCOUNTABLE NUMBERS OF CITIES, NATIONS AND TRIBES, WHO ARE CERTAIN TO BE GROUND INTO OBLIVION ONCE THESE TWO POWERS COLLIDE.

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JEFF ECKLEBERRY: LETTERER

MATT IDELSON: EDITOR

SPECIAL THANKS TO
SARA FRAZETTA & JOE WEBER

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WHAT IN THE MANY HELLS?!

A DESCRIPTION MORE APT THAN YOU KNOW, GIANT!

BUT YOU WON'T LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO DISCOVER WHY.

HA!

THUD!

SCANT FIGHT IN YOU, DESPITE YOUR FRIGHTENING APPEARANCE.

THEN AGAIN, NOT MUCH CAN STAND AGAINST...

..."THE AX THAT BROKE TEN THOUSAND SHIELDS."

ATUGHHHH

URRRRRNNN?

HUH? STILL ALIVE AFTER ALL?

THAT *IS* IMPRESSIVE.

OTWA GOT YOU NOW!

YOU THINK YOU MAKE OTWA DEAD?

OTWA NEVER DEAD!

WHOA!

OTWA IS ALWAYS MIGHTIEST!

ALWAYS!

OTWA IS--!

UUUUUALLLGH...

ICEPEAK CITADEL.

MOTHER!

A FOUL AND BLOODY CRIME!

LOOK!

LOOK WHAT THEY DID TO YOUR SON!

KALEDAN!

I WENT TO SUMMON HIM TO YOUR COUNCIL, ARRIVING JUST IN TIME TO SEE THE ASSASSIN CROUCHED OVER HIS BODY.

THE INTRUDER WORE THE RED CLOAK OF ONE OF PRINCE TARO'S ELITE RIDERS.

WE FOUGHT, HE GOT AWAY.

BUT NOT BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO CUT THIS OFF OF HIM.

THE SIGNET RING OF THE DRAGONHAWK KNIGHTS!

WHICH IS HOW HE WAS ABLE TO ESCAPE ME.

HE THREW HIMSELF OUT OF THE HIGH WINDOW--

--I THOUGHT TO KILL HIMSELF, RATHER THAN BE TAKEN ALIVE.

BUT THEN I SAW HE HAD ONE OF THOSE ACCURSED DRAGONHAWKS AT THE READY.

I STOOD HELPLESS AT THE WINDOW TO SEE THEM FLY AWAY.

I'LL HAVE HIS BLOOD ON MY BLADE AND HIS SOUL IN A JAR!

IF ONLY I'D ARRIVED ONE MOMENT EARLIER!

NO.

YOU DID ALL YOU COULD.

HOW COULD YOU HOPE TO OVERCOME ANY WARRIOR STRONG ENOUGH TO BEST MY KALEDAN?

OF COURSE, MOTHER.

YOUR ONE BELOVED SON.

ELSEWHERE...

:UURRRRR:

NOBLE THUNDER-HEART.

ARE YOU GONE?

NO, THERE'S STILL LIFE IN YOU.

A SPARK THAT NEEDS KINDLING.

SO THEN, DRAW LIFE FROM ME, MY FRIEND.

DRINK DEEP OF MY YEARS.

TAKE ALL THAT YOU NEED.

BETTER NOW?

NOW LET'S SEE WHERE THE GIANT GOT OFF TO.

HE HAD TO BE IN BAD SHAPE NOT TO FINISH ME OFF WHILE I WAS HELPLESS.

HERE WE GO.

THE CREATURE LEAVES AN EASY TRAIL TO FOLLOW.

OH.

DIDN'T GET FAR.

AMAZED YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.

WHERE ARE YOU TRYING TO GET HOME TO WITH SUCH RESOLVE?

DAMMIT.

WHO KILLS A HELPLESS FOE?

A SMART ONE--THAT'S WHO.

JUST IN CASE THE GIANT LIVES TO SOMEDAY SEEK REVENGE.

ANOTHER THING I'LL NO DOUBT COME TO REGRET SOMEDAY.

MOMMY.

I'LL DESTROY THEM FOR THIS!

AS OPPOSED TO THE REASON YOU PLANNED TO DESTROY THEM BEFORE THIS?

DON'T BE SUCH A SARCASTIC ASS.

FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE, HAVE SOME SENSE OF THE MOMENT.

YOU'RE THE CROWN PRINCE NOW.

TIME TO GROW UP AND ACT LIKE IT.

AUUUGHHHH!

MOTHER?

WHAT--?

IT'S THE TRANSFER BEGINNING.

BUT THIS CAN'T HAPPEN. NOT YET.

THE WITCH ASSURED ME HER SPELL WOULD WORK.

FAR TO THE SOUTH...

SUDDENLY THE MONSTROUS WARRIOR GAVE OFF FROM THE CHASE, JUST AS WE WERE DOOMED.

WE DIDN'T SEE WHAT INTERVENED, BUT I THINK THE STORIES ARE TRUE THAT SOME PROVIDENTIAL FIGURE WATCHES OVER US.

THE MYSTERIOUS PROTECTOR OF YOUR STORY-BOOKS?

A MYTH.

A FOLKTALE TO COMFORT THE OLD IN THEIR HOVELS AND SCARED CHILDREN IN THEIR BEDS.

THE ONLY THING PROTECTING US IS OURSELVES, AND OUR DUTY TO RELEASE THE FIRE, WHEN THE TIME COMES.

MAY OUR RESOLVE NEVER WAVER.

ONLY AS A LAST RESORT, HUSBAND.

RELEASING THE FIRE WILL LIKELY CAUSE AS MUCH DEATH AND DANGER AS IT PREVENTS.

EVERY-THING COMES AT A PRICE.

NOW, LEAVE OFF WHISPERING AND STEP BACK.

IT'S TIME TO GET ON WITH THE BUSINESS OF THE ROYAL COURT, NO MATTER HOW MUCH THESE GATHERINGS ANNOY ME.

NOBLE LADIES AND KNIGHTS; ESTEEMED ALLIES, DELEGATES AND ENVOYS FROM EVERY TRIBE, CITY, AND NEIGHBORING KINGDOM.

WELCOME, ALL OF YOU.

WE'RE GATHERED AMIDST APPROPRIATE POMPS AND CEREMONIES TO RENEW OUR SACRED PROMISES OF MUTUAL PROTECTION AGAINST THE ONE INTRACTABLE ENEMY THAT BESETS ALL OF US.

WELCOME TO A DELEGATION FROM THE DISTANT SOUTH HAS JOURNEYED HERE. THANK YOU, KING LADANABANDA, FOR RECOGNIZING HOW IMPORTANT THIS CONCLAVE IS.

AND LASTLY, LET ME CALL OUT NOBLE SALTU, HEREDITARY CHIEF OF PANTERA KAI, AND MY BELOVED FATHER BY MARRIAGE.

I SEE THAT OPAN KAR, HONORED KING OF UNDERDEEP, REPRESENTING THE VASTNESS OF THE THIRTY-THREE ALLIED KINGDOMS, OF SEAS, LAKES AND RIVERS.

AND I TAKE NOTE OF DREAD LORD MOHN OF THE OPHIDI KAI, WHO'S WISELY SET ASIDE HIS HEREDITARY ENMITY AGAINST THE UNDERSEA TRIBES, IN RECOGNITION OF OUR MORE DEADLY MUTUAL ENEMY.

WE ALSO SALUTE SKY MASTER LARON OF THE RUPANDA AERUS, BREEDERS AND TAMERS OF THE MIGHTY DRAGONHAWKS THAT KEEP OUR SKIES SAFE.

HEROIC KAL, CELEBRATED CHIEF OF THE AURICRINE PEOPLES, WHOSE VILLAGES DOT THE NORTHERN VALLEYS, FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST THE ICE.

AT THE SAME TIME...

WHAT DID THOSE TERRIBLE CREATURES DO TO YOU, MY SON?

BUT DON'T WORRY. MOTHER'S HERE NOW.

YOU'RE ALIVE.

THAT'S ENOUGH FOR NOW.

AND IN TIME MY WORKINGS IN THE HIGHER ARTS WILL RESTORE YOU, GOOD AS NEW.

I PROMISE.

MONSTER MAN SMASHED OTWA GOOD.

SHHHHH. SLEEP NOW. RECOVER YOUR STRENGTH.

ROLIEL!

WITCH!

ATTEND ME, THIS INSTANT!

YOU BUNGLED THE SPELL!

THE TRANSFER YOU SWORE YOU'D DELAY HAS ALREADY BEGUN!

I WARNED YOU THIS COULD HAPPEN, JULIANA.

JUST AS ANTIDOTES ARE MADE FROM THE VERY POISON THEY HOPE TO CURE, A SPELL TO DELAY A THING MAY HURRY IT INSTEAD.

FIX THIS!

NOW!

DO THE SPELL AGAIN!

IMPOSSIBLE.

IT TOOK ME MONTHS TO GATHER THE INGREDIENTS AND PREPARE THE RITUAL.

BY THE TIME I DO ALL OF THAT AGAIN, IT WILL BE TOO LATE.

MY ADVICE TO YOU IS HURRY UP TO DO WHATEVER YOU CAN, BEFORE YOUR SON TAKES OVER.

IF I UNDERSTAND THE WAY THE POWER WORKS, YOU'LL STILL HAVE YEARS YET, BEFORE YOUR SHARE OF THE MAGIC FADES ENTIRELY.

I'LL GET YOU FOR THIS!

NO DOUBT.

THE FOLLOWING DAY...

YOUR FIRST ACT AS CROWN PRINCE IS TO CALL OUT THE FORCES.

SOW CHAOS AND TERROR THROUGHOUT THE LANDS BETWEEN HERE AND FIRE KEEP.

WHICH FORCES SHOULD I UNLEASH?

ALL OF THEM.

EVERYTHING.

"OPEN ALL THE VAULTS AND RELEASE TERRORS UPON OUR FOES.

SEND EVERY TRIBE ALLIED WITH US.

"SHOW THOSE SCUM THE PRICE OF ASSASSINATION. AND BUY ME THE TIME TO DO ONE FINAL VITAL WORKING BEFORE I STOP RESISTING AND LET YOU RECEIVE THE POWER.

"MY LONG-RANGE PLAN? IT'S ENCOURAGING YOU FINALLY ASKED, BUT IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS. YOUR BROTHER WOULD'VE GUESSED IT BY NOW.

"THEIR FIRE COULD WELL DESTROY OUR ICE, SO IT WOULD BE BEST NOT TO LET IT EVER COME TO THAT. THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE VICTORY IS TO MAKE SURE THE FIRE IS NEVER RELEASED."

AND THE WAY TO GUARANTEE THAT IS FOR YOU TO BECOME THE ONE WITH HIS HANDS ON THE LEVERS.

SINCE THEY INTRODUCED ASSASSINATION AS A TOOL OF STATECRAFT, WE'RE GOING TO GIVE THEM A LESSON IN HOW TO DO IT PROPERLY.

WE'RE GOING TO KILL THEIR KING AND QUEEN, AND OLDEST HEIR.

YOU'LL MARRY THE NEXT IN LINE-- THAT INSIPID HALF BREED PANTHER GIRL--WHICH MAKES YOU THE KING OF BOTH REALMS.

OTHER POWERS--THE ALLIED SULTANS AND TRIBAL CHIEFS--WON'T SIT STILL FOR THAT.

THEN WE'LL KILL THEM TOO.

ABOUT TIME YOU LEARNED POLITICS AT THIS LEVEL IS MESSY.

AND THE OPERATIVE RULE IS, IF YOU MUST MAKE A MESS, MAKE A BIG ONE.

IK NUC ALFO TUP GAD POLLA RESH WATH IKA MAFT.

KAS, IKU. GA KATAS O PAHT NU DIS HAWO, ALFO.

HMMM

MORE SUBHUMAN RAIDING PARTIES, UP TO NO GOOD.

LOOK AT YOU, LAZY BONES, LAGGING SO FAR BEHIND YOUR FELLOW WARRIORS.

A DANGEROUS LAPSE, AS YOU'RE ABOUT TO LEARN.

BECAUSE I'VE NEED OF YOUR WEAPONS.

SHUSHHHHH.

NO NEED TO ALERT YOUR FRIENDS.

LET'S REMOVE OURSELVES SOMEWHERE OFF THE BEATEN PATH.

JUST IN CASE ONE OF YOUR FELLOWS MISSES YOU.

NOW THEN, WHEN YOU WAKE UP, WE'LL HAVE A LITTLE CHAT, PROVIDED I CAN DECIPHER YOUR GUTTURAL TONGUE.

FIRE AND ICE

THE PRICE OF POWER

BILL WILLINGHAM
LEONARDO MANCO
JEFF ECKLEBERRY
MATT IDELSON

SPECIAL THANKS
TO SARA FRAZETTA
AND JOE WEBER

ABOUT TIME SOMEONE FINDS OUT WHAT YOU INTRUSIVE BRUTES ARE UP TO, DOWN IN OUR LANDS.

NEXT: THINGS ESCALATE.

DYNAMITE® DISPATCH
DECEMBER 2023

NEXT ISSUE

Having survived his duel with Otwa, Darkwolf must now deal with a mysterious force that seems determined to stop him in his tracks. Meanwhile, Nekron manipulates Juliana's grief, and a new wave of horrors are unleashed on an unprepared world - forcing Jarol, the King of Fire Keep, to respond. Is hope still visible through the cracks of the slowly expanding ice?

Find out in Fire and Ice #3 as acclaimed comics creators BILL WILLINGHAM (Fables, Legenderry) and LEONARDO MANCO (Hellstorm: Prince of Lies, Blaze of Glory) delve ever deeper into the world of the acclaimed film!

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST REWINDS THE CLOCK, CELEBRATES 666 ISSUES, AND CHARGES FORWARD IN THE MOST HISTORIC VAMPIRELLA STORY YET!

Priest, we must ask you of course what you think of the fun numbering here with *Vampirella* #666. You've been involved in a few big celebratory anniversary issues in the course of your career, like *Conan the Barbarian* #200, the big #1,000 marks for *Detective Comics* and *Marvel Comics*, and we won't think too hard about how a #1,000,000 issue comes to be…

I think it apropos to give the comic the same number as my age :-)

I don't know, I think the biz has changed a lot over time. A lot of us older fans really enjoyed the issue numbering and felt it important to keep our sets complete. A NUMBER ONE was a huge deal, and milestone numbering was an event to be celebrated. I think all the reboots have diminished this aspect a great deal, with younger generations of fans now not as invested or not invested in quite the same way.

You first took on the helm of the Vampirella franchise in 2019 for our big 50th anniversary. It all kicked off with an echo of the origins that fans had previously seen for the character, with her as the sole survivor of a tragic plane crash. We hear fans will be seeing that moment again here, maybe even more than once, with a big twist. What is going down this time?

For *Vampirella*, we'd completed our 50th anniversary volume with our issue #25, and that allowed us to stretch and explore a bit over the course of the pandemic through *Vampirella/Dracula: Unholy*, its bookend *Vampirella/Dracula: Rage*, and the way-too-much-fun *Vampirella Year One*.

But I knew that, presuming Dynamite didn't ship me off to the Old Writers' Home, what I would want to do most was get back to basics. Our 50th Anniversary run began with a fairly simple premise: a single girl trying to make it on her own in the big city. She just happens to be a vampire from outer space with a pushy, vengeful mother and a collection of supernatural enemies out to kill her.

After the heaviness of *Rage*, wherein a vengeful Vampirella becomes consumed by darkness, I wanted to get back to where we started with the wonder, fun, and poignancy of those first issues and Vampirella restored to her whimsical goodness. We've done that… sorta.

There's always a catch. I mean, that's the fun of reading ANY story, any novel or magazine or comic. There's the story you think you know, and then there's the unexpected curve that creates the thrill ride. And that's where we are with issue #666: back home, back where we belong. Sorta.

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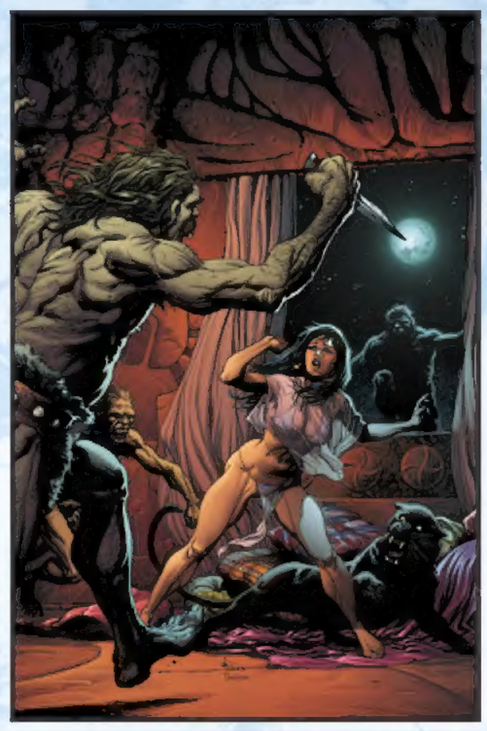

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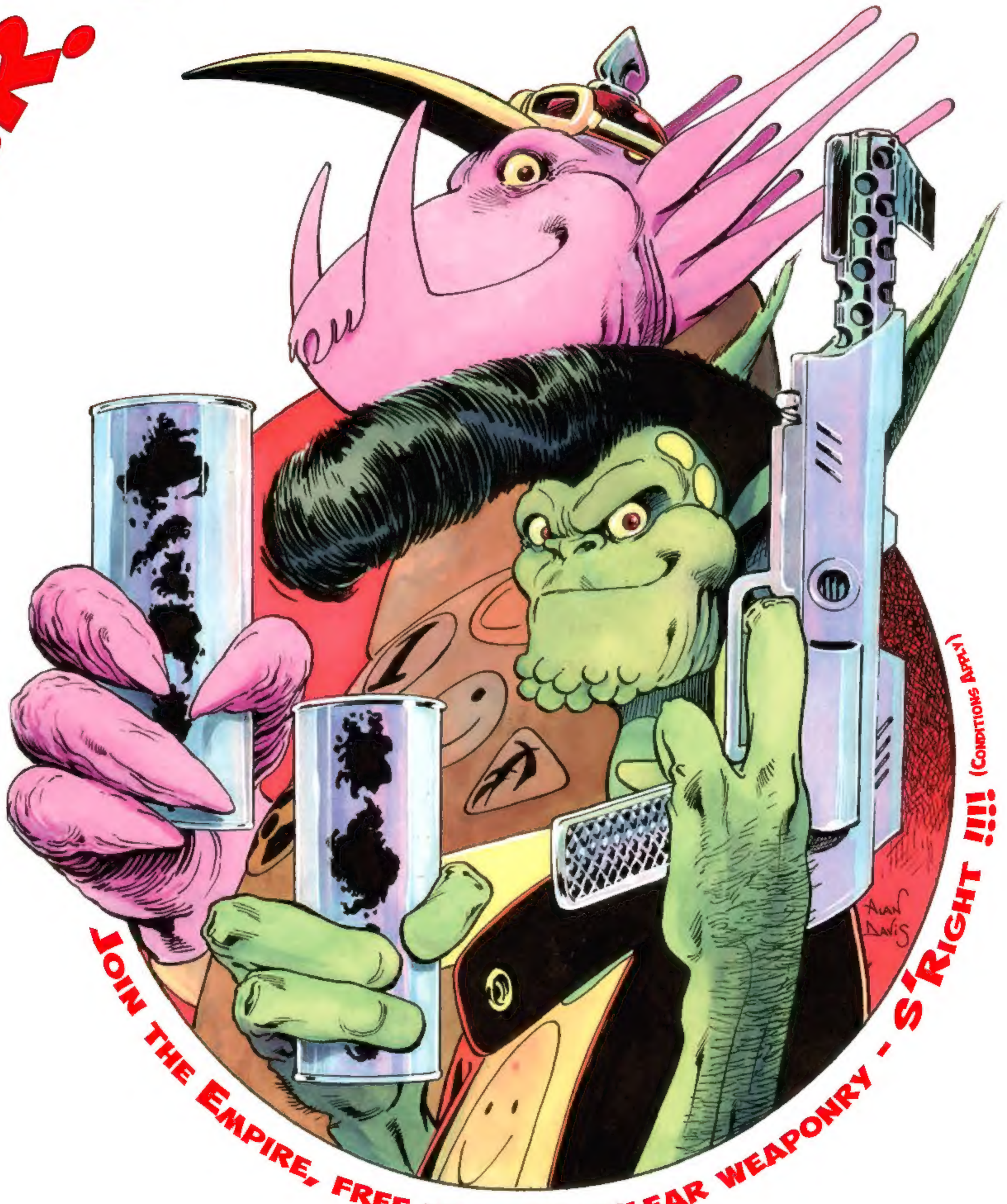

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